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SOVIET-DEFENSE
BY ROBERLHINGTON (UPI) -- A NEW CIA REPORT ON THE SOVIET ECONOMY INDICATES DEFENSE COSTS HAVE RISEN AT A SLOWER RATE THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT, ALTHOUGH THE SOVIET'S COMMITMENT TO THE MILITARY STILL FAR OUTSTRIPS U.S. OUTLAYS.

"NEW INFORMATION INDICATES THAT THE SOVIETS DID NOT FIELD WEAPONS AS RAPIDLY AFTER 1976 AS BEFORE," SAID THE REPORT RELEASED FRIDAY BY THE CONGRESSIONAL JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE.

SEN. WILLIAM PROXMIRE, D-WIS., SUBCOMMITTEE VICE CHAIRMAN, SAID THE SLOWDOWN OF SOVIET DEFENSE GROWTH RATES "HAS PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE THAT HAS NOT YET PENETRATED POLICY CIRCLES."

"IN ONE SENSE, THE CIA'S NEW ESTIMATES DEMONSTRATE THAT THE SOVIET DEFENSE PROGRAM IS VERY LARGE AND STILL GROWING, ALTHOUGH AT A SLOWER RATE THAN BEFORE," PROXMIRE SAID.

"BUT MOSCOW HAS NOT BEEN EXPANDING ITS EFFORT AT THE RAPID RATE THAT WAS ONCE BELIEVED. IT SLOWED ITS DEFENSE EXPANSION BEGINNING ABOUT SEVEN YEARS AGO, A FACT THE SOVIETS NEGLECTED TO COMMUNICATE AND THAT THE WEST FAILED TO DETECT."

THE STUDY WAS PREPARED BY CIA'S OFFICE OF SOVIET ANALYSIS AND WAS PRESENTED TO PROXMIRE'S SUBCOMMITTEE BY ROBERT GATES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR INTELLIGENCE, DURING CLOSED HEARINGS IN SEPTEMBER.

THE REPORT SAID SOVIET DEFENSE SPENDING IN CONSTANT 1970 RUBLE PRICES CONTINUES TO INCREASE. "HOWEVER, THE NEW EVIDENCE INCORPORATED IN OUR PRESENT ESTIMATE INDICATES THAT IN AT LEAST ONE MAJOR AREA, THE PROCUREMENT OF MILITARY HARDWARE, SOVIET EXPENDITURES HAVE LEVELED OFF SINCE 1976."

PRACTICALLY ALL MAJOR CATEGORIES OF SOVIET WEAPONS WERE AFFECTED -- MISSILES, AIRCRAFT, AND SHIPS, THE CIA SAID, ADDING THAT THE TREND WAS ONLY PARTIALLY OFFSET BY THE TENDENCY OF NEWER, MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS TO COST MORE.

THE CIA REPORT STRESSED THAT TRENDS IN SOVIET MILITARY SPENDING "ARE NOT A SUFFICIENT BASIS TO FORM JUDGMENTS ABOUT SOVIET MILITARY CAPABILITIES, WHICH ARE A COMPLEX FUNCTION OF WEAPONS STOCKS, DOCTRINE, TRAINING, GENERALSHIP, AND OTHER FACTORS.

IN 1981 THE DOLLAR COST OF SOVIET DEFENSE ACTIVITIES WAS 45 PERCENT HIGHER THAN U.S. OUTLAYS, AND PROCUREMENT COSTS ALONE ALSO WERE 45 PERCENT HIGHER, THE REPORT SAID.

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